

FIGHT AMONG MUSICIANS.

Mr. Samuel Aitken Writes a Redhot
Reply to the Strictures of the
Toronto Professors.

SOME PERTINENT QUESTIONS ASKED.

Hon. Secretary of the Associated
Board Talks About the Unworthy
Opposition Worked Up.

(From Toronto World, March 10, 1899.)

Editor World: It is quite a year from Mr. Aitken's recent letter, and any further attempt at conciliation will only be regarded as so much weakness. I therefore ask you to be good enough, in the interests of musical education in this country, to publish the following letter.

I will then trouble you no further, but will leave the case, as far as the press is concerned, before the public. I hope if we have any unworthy motives, or are not actuated by the most sincere desire to do a good work, that Canada will have none of us, but consign us to the oblivion which such a course would merit. And, au contraire, I am sure Canada will estimate at its true value the very unworthy and unscrupulous opposition with which we have met.

I beg to say that I spoke the truth in my former letter and I have not one word to withdraw. I shall be prepared to substantiate it whenever and wherever that may be necessary.

I think it will be well, in further discussing this matter, to mention at once a few facts, and to ask a few questions, which may tend to elucidate the present position of affairs.

1. It has been freely asserted that the Associated Board has no connection with the R.A.M., and the E.C.M. I presume I may take it for granted that the letter which was signed by Sir Alexander C. Mackenzie and Sir Hubert Parry, the principals of these institutions, has finally disposed of this fiction.

2. With regard to the "protests" it was evidently difficult for the protesters to get over the fact of the invitation which has been freely given by and on behalf of the principals and directors of the three Canadian colleges for many years past. All sorts of side issues as to individual opinions and all sorts of confusion as to dates have been freely scattered about. There has also been a distinct change of ground as to the reasons now existing for the opposition, and it has lately been thought the right thing to say that the objections are lodged to the Associated Board's scheme "as introduced by Mr. Aitken, the honorary secretary." I should like to inquire as to what is this method of introduction which seems to be so much condemned and which is about the only remaining reason given for opposing these examinations?

Does Mr. F. H. Torrington object to my letter of April, 1897, (to which he never replied), when, on behalf of the Associated Board, I offered to send out an examiner to examine his candidates, without any consideration as to a profit, and for the mere out-of-pocket expenses? Is that objected to, and does that look like "greed for gain and being influenced by money-making motives"? The Professor has another grievance, namely, that I did not call upon him in Toronto last year. I have already explained to him that I was only in Toronto for one Sunday and one working day, but I must again ask him a question, which I have previously put to him as to how he could expect any further communication from me so long as he left my latest letter unrepplied to.

Now, as to Mr. J. Humphrey Anger (representing himself and Dr. Fisher, the director of the Toronto Conservatory of Music). Of what method of the honorary secretary do they complain? I spent the greater part of the only day which I had at my disposal in Toronto with them. I invited them and some of the chief professors of the conservatory to meet Mr. Lee Williams and myself for friendly discussion respecting our scheme, and I offered to join hands with them, to share the labor and the expense of the examinations, and to divide the fees equally between them and ourselves. I should like to know what is wrong with that method.

This has, however, given Mr. Vogt an occasion for using a coarse and unmannerly expression about "sharing the work."

I well remember when I visited this conservatory that Dr. Fisher put a very pertinent question to me. He said: "We derive our revenue from students' fees and from examination fees. We paid 6 per cent. dividend last year, and we hope to pay more during the coming year. If we are willing to give up half of the fees to you, what are we going to get in return?" I admitted the force of this question from a business point of view, and even offered as far as any institution in Toronto was concerned, to confine our examinations to the conservatory. That, instead of being appreciated, has, I think, been used altogether against me.

Now, as to Montreal and Mr. Hiseley. Mr. Hiseley does not deny his invitation to us, but says that we were too late—he had in the meantime founded the Dominion College of Music, and had come to the conclusion that that institution could do the work itself. Though I may regret that decision, and though I may hope that that institution will see its way to reverse it, still I admit that it was quite within its right, that it was quite logical, and I have no complaint to make of it. I am happy to think that we have not been subjected in Montreal to the vulgar abuse which has been so freely showered upon us in Toronto.

3. The next and perhaps the most serious objection that has been levelled against us is that our examinations would have a tendency to lower the standard of music in Canada. Sir, this assertion has been made over and over again, and not one particle of proof has been submitted to justify it. Have we lowered the standard in Canada up to the present moment by allowing our certificates to be cast throughout the colony? Which, out of the candidates we had last year, only one was found sufficiently good to pass, and that pass was only obtained by the candidates taking a lower grade examination than the one entered for, and when no one was found nearly good enough to satisfy our requirements for a teacher's certificate, I think it must be admitted that the Associated Board has not been prodigal in giving away its certificates, and that it cannot have done any injury to the status and standard of music in Canada.

In one of the many articles which have been copied from The London Truth, the writer refers (see Toronto Saturday Night, 21-1-99) to "the valuable work they, the Associated Board, are doing in Great Britain," but with an inconsistency which is quite inexplicable he says that work will be imperilled by our advent to Canada. This is, of course, ridiculous. It is impossible that an examining body, using the same syllabus, employing the same examiners and maintaining the same standard, can do good work in one country and bad work in another. No one can say that we have done anything but the very best of work in the United Kingdom, and therefore that ought to be sufficient guarantee that our work in Canada or any other colony will be beyond reproach. Indeed, sir, these scribblers cannot believe what they say themselves, and they do not expect anyone else to believe it; but they think they will throw a lump of mud in the hope that some of it may stick somewhere. The consistency of Truth may well be gathered from a conversation which I had last year with its musical critic. I complained to him that they were not careful enough in the charges and assertions which they published. His reply was, "Oh, Truth expects us to get up 52 gumbies every year." I said: "What, whether correct or not?" and he replied: "Oh, if they are not correct, they generally put themselves right." This would seem to me to be a very low standard of journalism.

It is unnecessary for me to notice the letter in which a person named Vincent has been kind enough to send to the press of this country and of England respecting our teachers' examination. It is sufficient to point to the letter which his chief, Dr. Turpin, has written to me and which I have already published. I have in my possession other letters from Dr. Turpin, condemning in much stronger language this unbecoming interference. I should not mention this further, except that Dr. Vincent's latest contributions, in which he claims, and rather glories in the claim, that he alone did it, seem to require an answer. One would have thought that he would have

been disposed to take the advice of his friends and withdraw his letter unconditionally. He prefers to leave it as it is without attempting any justification of it. He reminds me of the character sketched by one of our greatest novelists, who had neither the pluck to fight, nor grace to submit, nor the sense to run away. I should have thought, the four-fold offices of examiner, composer, music publisher, and commercial traveler would have been quite sufficient for this gentleman, instead of his constituting himself a critic of the Associated Board.

We have been described, on more occasions than one, as foreigners, and our examinations as a foreign invasion. Sir, we claim to belong to the Empire of Great Britain, and we had hoped that in Canada itself we should not have been looked upon as foreigners. It is very satisfactory to know that the very use of this expression has cost these gentlemen the sympathy of most Canadian University; and it is further most amusing to think that good, honest English and Scotch names should be described as foreigners by a gentleman who spells his name V-O-G-T.

One of our critics says that examinations and certificates must be like Caesar's wife, above suspicion. I quite agree with that, and I commend it most heartily to those Canadian institutions which are passing candidates at 50 out of 100 marks, and under the conditions which I described in my last letter. May I further ask if certificates, etc., must be beyond suspicion, should not criticism itself be above the suspicion of interested motives?

I am quite satisfied that what Canada wants more than anything else is good elementary and rudimentary teaching in all branches of music; and in order to secure these it will also require unimpeachable and reliable examinations such as the Associated Board are offering.

I should like, in conclusion, to ask a few questions:

1. Is it or is it not true that in the first week of February last, at the Toronto Conservatory, the pianoforte examinations were Dr. Fisher, Mr. Vogt and Mr. Harrison? Is it true that these gentlemen went through the solemn farce of examining their own pupils and of awarding them certificates and diplomas?

2. Would it be true to say that at the June examination of last year Mr. W. H. Sherwood of Boston, who was engaged, was personally engaged, paid and controlled by Dr. Fisher, and does it invariably happen that Dr. Fisher's pupil secures the principal Conservatory gold medal for pianoforte playing?

4. Would it be true to say that Signor Agramonte, who was vocal examiner last June, made a protest as to the inefficiency of the work of the candidates, proposed a more searching examination, but was overruled by Dr. Fisher and the candidates allowed to pass?

4. Is it true that Mr. J. Humphrey Anger, who teaches theory at the Conservatory, always sets the examination papers and examines the work of his own pupils, and is it correct that one of his pupils always takes the highest prize in harmony?

6. Is it true that Mr. W. E. Fairclough's verdict in his examinations at the Toronto College is revised and overruled by the director, Mr. Torrington? And would it be correct to say that these examinations are under the control of the person most directly interested?

6. Should these questions be all answered in the affirmative, is it not easy to see that these judges are as likely to be as impartial in respect of their own pupils as a mother is of her own child?

And, further, does not this justify the quotation which I gave in my last letter: "The fact of the matter is there is no examination in Canada at present (except that of the Associated Board), which is entirely unprejudiced and beyond the possibility of suspicion?" And who are the "foreigners"? Messrs. Fisher, Sherwood and Agramonte from the States? or say, Sir Alex Mackenzie, Sir Hubert Parry and Sir Arthur Sullivan?

I think, sir, there is ample work for the Associated Board to do in Canada, and I hope Canadians will see that it is imperative in the interests of musical art that some outside responsible, unprejudiced and reliable body should be called in to test their musical work.

I propose to publish, in a short pamphlet, extracts from the letters and more recent sayings of the musical professors, who are now opposing us and who formerly welcomed us. They will form instructive and amusing reading.

Samuel Aitken, Hon. Sec. Assoc. Board.
Toronto, March 9.